

NOVEMBER 23, 2004

SCHAKOWSKY JOINS IL PIRG IN RELEASING 2004 *TROUBLE IN TOYLAND* REPORT

CHICAGO, IL - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), the top Democrat on the Commerce, Trade and Consumer Protection subcommittee, today joined Illinois Public Interest Research Group (IL PIRG) in releasing the [2004 "Trouble in Toyland" report](#). Schakowsky is a leading Congressional force behind strengthening current product safety regulations and has spearheaded legislation to impose stricter federal protections and mandatory testing of children's durable products.

"The information in [PIRG's report](#) will save lives. Families, during this Holiday Season, will be armed with a critical tool as they shop for toys for their loved-ones," Schakowsky said. She added that "PIRG's previous 18 reports have resulted in more than 120 corrective actions by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPCS) and toy manufacturers."

Following requests from Schakowsky, Congress finally held a hearing on toy safety last month. Experts and parents, including Lisa Lipin, a mother who has become a consumer advocate after her son was nearly strangled by a yo-yo ball, testified about the critical need to expand and strengthen the authority of the CPSC. CPSC has refused to ban the sale of yo-yo balls in the United States even though it has received nearly 400 injury reports.

Schakowsky said that changing the culture of the CPSC is a top legislative priority. "The culture of the CPSC is one that favors corporate profits over consumer safety. The CPSC approaches product safety with caution and delay - wait for a disaster before warning consumers. Unsafe and deadly toys should never make it into our homes and into our children's hands in the first place."

Schakowsky concluded, "The real present we can give all consumers the next holiday season is the guarantee that the products they buy are safe and secure. We are not as safe until the CPSC becomes an agency with the authority, funding and mandate that puts the interests of consumers ahead of corporate profits."

Below is Schakowsky's written statement:

STATEMENT OF U.S. REP. JAN SCHAKOWSKY (D-IL)

**RANKING DEMOCRAT, COMMERCE, TRADE
AND CONSUMER PROTECTION SUBCOMMITTEE**

**RELEASE OF ILLINOIS PIRG'S 2004
"TROUBLE IN TOYLAND" REPORT
NOVEMBER 23, 2004**

Thank you, Illinois PIRG and John Gaudette for releasing the 19th annual "Trouble in Toyland" report; Nancy Cowles from Kids in Danger for your years of service to consumer and child product safety; Lisa Lipin for your tireless work in bringing to and keeping in the public spotlight the dangers of the yo-yo balls; and Dr. Elizabeth Powell for helping explain the harm the toys highlighted today can do.

The information in this report will save lives. Families, during this holiday season, will be armed with a critical tool as they shop for toys for their loved-ones. We know for a fact that PIRG's previous 18 reports have resulted in more than 120 corrective actions by the Consumer Product Safety Commission, or the CPSC and toy manufacturers.

That is a disgrace. It should not take a report by a watchdog group to force the government to protect our children. Unsafe and deadly toys should never make it into our homes and into our children's hands in the first place.

Unfortunately, the culture of the CPSC is one that favors corporate profits over consumer safety. The CPSC approaches product safety with caution and delay - wait for a disaster before warning consumers.

The yo-yo ball captures the culture of the CPSC. Yo-yo balls are dangerous toys that remain on the market today, even though the government has indisputable evidence that it must be banned. Here are the facts:

- The CSPC has received nearly 400 injury reports, including some where kids were almost strangled to death;
- yo-yo balls have been banned in some European countries;
- major retailers have agreed to stop selling it; and
- CPSC Chairman Stratton has taken the toy away from children in his family.

But the CPSC has issued only a warning stating that yo-yo balls present a "low but potential risk of strangulation," but refused to ban the toy. That inept action fails to inform parents about the dangers of this potentially deadly toy.

Most people think that if a product is on the shelf, then it must be safe. They believe the government is looking out for them and their children. In fact, a 1999 Coalition for Consumer Rights' survey in Illinois found that 75-percent of adults believe that the government oversees pre-market testing for children's products; 79-percent believe that manufacturers are required to test the safety of those products before they are sold.

For most products, neither is true. In fact, there are no mandatory safety standards for

the majority of the children's products being sold today. Congress passed legislation in 1981 that prohibits the CPSC from establishing mandatory standards in most cases. The bulk of standards that are in place are "voluntarily" set by the very industries looking to make profits and they are also expected to police themselves. There may be industry-set standards in place, but there are no requirements that all potential hazards are addressed in those standards, no requirement that products be tested in the field or tested to ensure the standards are met before being sold, and no consequences for the manufacturer if the standards are not met.

This is true even for baby carriers, cradles, play pens, high chairs and other items bought specifically for use by infants and children. Although the CPSC requires no testing and manufacturers may or may not perform their own tests, do not be mistaken, children's products are tested. They are tested in our own homes, with our children and grandchildren as test dummies. The cost of those tests can be a panicked child, bruised fingers, a near-strangulation, fractured skulls, or a dead child.

Unintended injuries are the leading cause of death for children under the age of four. As a leading expert on child product safety, Marla Felcher's research reveals, many of these deaths are because of unsafe products. And, as the title of her book says, "It's No Accident."

It's time to reclaim our rights as consumers to be protected from hazardous and harmful products. As the top Democrat on the Consumer Protection Subcommittee, I pushed for a hearing on unsafe products, including the yo-yo ball, and whether current safety standards for children's products were enough. We finally held that hearing in October and it confirmed what all of us have been saying all along: We are not as safe until the CPSC becomes an agency with the authority, funding and mandate that puts the interests of consumers ahead of corporate profits. That is one of my top priorities next Congress.

In the meantime, I will be calling on CPSC chairman Stratton to push manufactures to include registration cards with each product sold so consumers can be contacted if the product is recalled and to encourage companies to engage in "reverse marketing" campaign to reach consumer as quickly and as effectively as possible once a decision is made to remove a product from the marketplace.

This holiday season, parents have a tool, PIRG's "Trouble at Toyland," to help protect their children. But the real present we can give all consumers the next holiday season is the guarantee that the products they buy are safe and secure.